

# Self-Mastery

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## *CONTENTS*

	<b>Page No.</b>
I. MASTERY OF SELF .....	7
II. MAN HIS OWN FRIEND AND FOE.....	17
III. CONTROL OF BODY AND MIND .....	30
IV. CONQUEST OF OUR LOWER NATURE..	41
V. HOW TO CONSERVE OUR ENERGIES....	57
VI. SELF-HELP AND SELF-SURRENDER....	72

# I.

## MASTERY OF SELF

There is no king like him who is king of himself.—*St. Cadoc.*

Self-government gives supremacy; self-control confers contentment.—*Samhita.*

That king who knoweth well how to conquer lust, wrath, avarice, boastfulness and pride, can possess the sovereignty of the whole world—*Mahabharata.*

**T**HE thirst for happiness is a common instinct in all mankind; but every one does not possess the secret of acquiring it, nor the power to retain it when it comes. This requires both wisdom and endurance. Perhaps for this reason the great men of all countries and ages have laid such tremendous emphasis on a life of self-discipline and self-control. Self-discipline enables us to organize and unite all our scattered forces. This necessarily increases our power for both thought and action. It is not true, though it appears to be, that we have many isolated factors

in our life. The same energy which pulsates through our heart and brain also operates our hands and feet; therefore learning to collect and control this inherent energy, which now we fritter away through lack of co-ordination and co-operation, would mean the greatest asset in our life.

Self-mastery is a far greater possession than the possession of earthly goods. If we do not possess ourselves we may possess all the fine things of life and be unable to use them to any advantage. More than that we may unconsciously strike at the very root of our life. Under the influence of hatred or any violent, uncontrolled emotion, a person may do something he will always regret, the very thing which he knows to be destructive. If you ask him why he did it, he will say that he could not help it, that it was done before he knew it, in a flash of impulse. But why should such an impulse rise at all? It

comes because we lay the foundation for it. It is not through chance that we fall under the sway of these evils. It is we who make it possible for such detrimental influences to rise in us; also it is in our power to make it impossible.

If we reflect and penetrate into the depths of our being, we shall never fail to find that every event in our life is based on a just cause. If a man does something destructive to himself or to another, it is because he has allowed destructive thought to over-power him; he is no longer himself. He may be within reach of success, but if he loses mastery of himself, in a moment he can do that which will mean the undoing of all that he has done before.

There is a parable given by one of the great Indian mystics illustrative of this. A man was laboring one dry summer day, irrigating his orchard. He drew water from his well and worked steadily for a

long time, but when he went to examine the trees he found that all the water had been carried away by great rat holes in the ditch. The same thing happens to us. We pray, we meditate, we study, we go through all the practices we think should give us spiritual impetus, yet we stand still, or even take a backward step. Why is this? We have not fortified ourselves. A man may use high-sounding words expressing moral ideas, but if he lacks in the fundamental principle of life, if he lacks in patience, forbearance, forgiveness, he will burst out in anger some day and then all his dogmas and theories will go for nothing.

Without poise we cannot hope to find happiness. Happiness is a quality of mind. It is something we possess within. If we do not have it within, nothing outside can give it to us. If we have it within, no matter what obstacles are placed before us, we

surmount them. The Roman philosopher Marcus Aurelius puts this very strongly, —“Be cheerful also, and seek not external help nor the tranquillity which others give. A man must stand erect, not be kept erect by others.” He who possesses himself wholly may be confined in a dungeon, or he may be forced into crowds alien to his temperament, yet he will maintain himself. This is what we must all learn to do.

The discipline of life is a very wonderful one. Mastery is not for those who are always trying to shirk and shun everything that is disagreeable. If we keep on avoiding what is difficult we shall never go one step forward. It is this which awakens our inner faculties.

There are two ways of approaching the subject of self-conquest: we can approach it with the spirit of self-exertion or with the spirit of self-abandonment. These seem like two contrary ideas; yet we find



holy men, saints, in complete possession of themselves, with perfect mastery over their appetites and passions, who are entirely free of all sense of aggression or self-exertion. They have surrendered themselves so wholly to the Highest that there is no more room in their hearts for any darkness, no possibility left for the uprise of anger or evil. When we have absolutely transformed ourselves there is no question of calculation: shall I be angry or not, shall I speak harshly or shall I contain myself? These thoughts do not rise because our mind has no longer any place for them.

He who wishes to do his part well, who desires his action to be fruitful, will study his deeper nature. He will find it wiser to pause a few moments before acting rather than to spend time afterwards, striving to undo what he has done in a moment of haste or madness. Self-control or self-

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mastery is not merely an interesting theme of study for students of religion or philosophy. It is a vital necessity in our lives if we would maintain social order and keep harmony and healthfulness in the household. Our friends may strive to create peaceful conditions for us, but if our mind is not at peace, we shall only find momentary satisfaction. There are those who are never satisfied; they always want something different. It is not by gratifying our desires that we shall find any lull, but rather by uniting them and making them harmonious with our higher purpose. This does not imply that we must crush every desire that rises in our mind. It would be like covering a fire with ashes,—the fire would still be there intact. We do not free ourselves from our lower propensities by this method, but by gaining greater knowledge, by gaining greater unity within ourselves.

When our thought, mind and heart,—when our whole being is focused in absolute unison, then shall we find high ideals rising within us spontaneously; then the things that belong to the lower levels will touch us no more. It is in this way that we overcome and not by calculation. Spirituality is not a question of calculation nor is it a question of doctrines or words or theories. It is something we evolve within us and after we have evolved it, others benefit by it. Of course we are the first to benefit because our life becomes transformed. We are the same and yet we are not the same. We have the same hands and feet but they are, put to better use; we have the same mind and heart, but they are filled with greater ideas and ideals.

The only way we can rise, the only way we can lift our fellow-beings, is to find a higher level of consciousness. If we have

a nobler standard of life, if we possess self-control, if we are masters of ourselves, we shall not need to state it in words. All who are living around us—children, brothers, sisters, friends—will benefit by what we are. They may become impatient with us, intolerant that we are different from them, but if we hold fast to our own ideals they will turn to us in moments of distress. In time of storm, anger, impatience, or great grief, one who is not molested by these things, becomes like a rock; others cling to him and find their consolation.

Does that mean that in order to gain self-mastery we must grow unfeeling like a block of wood or a stone? We should not confuse these ideas. Unfeeling people are often self-centred and selfish. Mastery is not for them, or for the person who is harsh and hard, but rather for him whose consciousness has become expanded, who instead of revolving round

and round with the petty feelings of self and selfishness, suddenly comes into possession of another part of his life. He is infused with divine power and naturally is no longer capable of doing anything that is base or ignoble. These great characteristics do not come by accident; they are the result of our thinking and living.

High ideals are not lacking. Even from the standpoint of self-preservation, of personal happiness, we should cultivate mastery of self, because therein lies the secret of all strength and fulfillment. The same efforts we are making now will bring us the highest. All they need is proper direction and fortification. That is what self-mastery means. Mastery of self gives us such wisdom that we may always in all circumstances depend on our own inward strength.

## II.

### MAN HIS OWN FRIEND AND FOE

He who is his own friend, is a friend to all men.—  
*Seneca.*

Seek not self, but seek the Truth. The Truth is a living power for good, indestructible and invincible.—  
*Buddha.*

The divine voice of thunder repeats *da, da, da*. That is, be subdued, be generous, be compassionate. Therefore let this triad be taught: subdue, give and have mercy.—  
*Upanishad.*

**T**O what extent is it true that we are our own friend and our own enemy? In the great Indian spiritual classic, the Bhagavad-Gita, the Lord of Wisdom tells us: "Let a man raise himself by his Self, let him never lower himself; for he alone is the friend of himself, and he alone is the enemy of himself. He who has conquered himself by the Self, he is the friend of himself, but he whose self is unconquered, his self acts as his own enemy like an external foe." But who would knowingly be his own enemy? Perhaps we

would not act as our enemy if we had conscious possession of ourselves, but very few of us have.

Whenever we start to do anything with dejected mind, or carry an evil impulse in our heart, do we not act as our own enemy? We know ethically and intellectually the bad effect these have upon our moral and physical being, and yet we stagger on carrying a load which exhausts us. How can we explain it, that an intelligent person should allow his mind to be filled with detrimental thoughts. Here we see the distinction between theoretical knowledge and its practical application. Until we have gained full possession of our being, without meaning to do so, we shall often drag ourselves down by our twisted thought, our wrong attitude of mind. We are like a man who is pulling on his oars but can make no headway because he has not lifted the anchor. So long as we are

loaded down by the weight of matter, we cannot advance. The Self is the friend of the self for him who has conquered himself—his lower self—but one whose self is unconquered his self acts as an enemy.

We become our own enemy when we are thrown out of balance by anger, hatred, grief or any intense emotion. We are for the time being obsessed by something alien. Anger is such an obsession. It is a very ugly thing in life. It disfigures a person. One who is pleasant and lovable can be so changed by anger or jealousy that even if we try we can no longer find any trace of beauty in his face, it has become so distorted. Yet the whole of us is not obsessed. We are like two persons,—the person who is angry and the person who is not. There is a dual principle in us. One part of us aspires for the highest, best, purest and finest; the other is earth-bound, weighted down by material concerns.



In the Gita there is another passage which runs: "Lust, anger and greed, these three are the soul-destroying gates of hell. Therefore one should forsake these three." When we analyze we find there is little distinction between them. A greedy person, longing for some object of desire with all the lust of his soul, becomes angry if he cannot have his way. Anger brings self-delusion. The cause of it and of all such things is ignorance. By sudden anger we destroy a finer part of ourself; in a moment we lose something it will take long to build up again. This is the reason we are told so definitely that we are our own friend and our own foe. In spite of this we lay the blame on others. There is hardly a soul who does not blame some one else for his misfortune, his failure. But the eye of wisdom reveals to us that the cause we seek lies in our own self. Thus self-adjustment and self-possession

are essential to our well-being. One who has control over his own self, who is serene in the midst of all dual conditions—heat and cold, pleasure and pain, noise and stillness, under all circumstances—will carry with him wherever he goes the constant realization of his supreme Self.

We cannot expect to have everything made smooth for us. There is great doubt in my mind whether it would be really good for any one. We need individual discipline. Theoretical knowledge and actual experience are two different things altogether. What we have heard, what we sometimes feel instinctively to be our own, we can only make our own through experience. We cannot have borrowed knowledge. Truth is something that we must absorb, must assimilate. We may know theoretically that wherever the mind dwells, according to that will be our knowledge, our strength and our success ;

but we have to know how to manipulate the mind, how to hold it, how to possess it. We may know that we have a higher Self and that it is our true friend, but in its light when we actually grasp its meaning and its application, the whole aspect of our life changes. We become bigger, stronger, more enduring. Endurance is one of the greatest assets in life. Those who do not know how to endure break down under the pressure of circumstance. They have not yet learned the art of life and living.

Sometimes we think that when we are excited and angry we exhibit strength. It is the weak person who yields to these lower emotions. A weak person is more unforgiving than a strong one. It can be seen among athletes. The strongest athletes are those who can best endure insults from an inferior. He who is nervously disorganized naturally has less endurance.

We cannot sever our mental and physical evolution from our spiritual. What we manifest in body and mind are the results of what we are in our spiritual consciousness. They are absolutely inseparable. Self-realization means that we have become consciously connected with our Source of being. Once we have made this connection, then nothing can go wrong; if we have not made it, then no matter how much we may try, everything goes wrong.

Realization is born of our own experience, is inseparable from us. In an emergency, in moments of great tragedy, the man of tranquillity, of serenity, of wisdom remains stable, while another man possessed of the knowledge that all the books can give, loses his control or his balance. Why does he lose it? Because he never had it. What is ingrained in our nature we are incapable of losing. We always

carry our light with us, always. Plato declares a wise man will be as happy in a state of slavery as in a state of freedom. Therefore self-mastery is a vital necessity if we would enjoy in full measure all the blessings of life. Our blessings are now often carried away by our shortcomings. Many a person after his first failure or when he meets with some obstacle settles down and says: I am not born equipped; it is not in my nature to do this. He has not even investigated his inner nature; he is judging only from the surface. If he would go deeper he would find that he has all the inherent powers and possibilities, more than he can possibly use. Let us remember our dual nature: faltering, failing, weak and unstable on the one side and on the other: majestic, potent, invincible. As we reflect upon the higher Self, as we try to find access to it, the lower nature will fade away.

With right attitude of mind, with right control over ourselves, we work for our own welfare, but when our mind is distorted or clouded it becomes our enemy. Every time we indulge in self-depreciation we go against our higher Self. Self-depreciation means that we have no faith in the higher Spirit. That is the reason we run ourselves down. Likewise whenever we are puffed up with vanity or are full of egotism, we turn away from our divine nature. Ego works in both ways. It exists as much in the life of wretchedness and despair as in the life of ostentation and pride. What we need above all else is the balanced state of mind where we do not go to one extreme or to the other, where we do not exalt ourselves because we are rich and powerful or debase ourselves because we are miserable and poor. No teaching gives this middle path with so much force and practical wisdom as the

Vedic revelation. The Gita constantly reminds us that above all other things we need this balance not merely on the heights of spiritual consciousness, but in our every day life. Some people can be over-sensitive in little things. If it is the least bit too warm or too cold they magnify their sufferings. But it is all in their own mental attitude. Even what we call a tragic situation is almost always magnified by our own life.

Let us take note of ourselves. If we start one day with an exalted attitude of mind, with courage, consecration and fearlessness, and another day with depression, doubt or dissatisfaction and observe their effect upon our life, we shall realize very quickly why it is declared that we are our own friend and our own enemy. Through depression we not only drag ourselves down, but we drag others down with us. A great teacher used to say that one who

is melancholy has no right to touch another person's life. Life is not meant for sadness; we should not throw our burden on another. We cannot be self-indulgent.<sup>1</sup> Some indulge themselves in unhappiness; they seem to love it. You pull them out of it and again they settle down. They have formed the habit of staying in that sphere and they alone can rescue themselves from it. All the religions, all the high ideals cannot help them from without till they have awakened themselves from within. That is the reason why the Gita says so forcibly: Raise thyself by thine own self—never lower thyself.

Sometimes people have the foolish notion that they cannot be spiritual unless they show a certain self-abasement. But the humility which is essential to spirituality is illustrated by the fruitful tree bending its boughs in fruition. A barren tree stands stiff and gives nothing. When



our life becomes fruitful it cannot help but show forth gentleness, mellowness, beneficent qualities, leaving no room for harshness. A life which is unproductive always finds fault with others and strikes a harsh note somewhere. That is why we should cultivate and unfold these inner principles. The same mind which is capable of thinking evil, hateful thoughts, also has infinite capacity for good and, constructive thought.

One of the most beautiful concepts that Buddha gave to his disciples was that a well-ordered mind will do greater good to a man than a friend or a father or a mother or any one from outside. People who live on other people's opinions, do they ever accomplish anything? When we perform a good action with our whole being and with unselfish spirit, whether others see it in the same way or not does not matter, it gives us joy and a sense of uplift.

If we depend on praise and recognition, if we have any self-glorifying attitude, we are undone. He who is dependent on praise is equally affected by blame. When our inner life is empty we cannot help but depend on the exterior, but after our inner life is filled we care less and less for all outer conditions. We are happier because of this, we create a happier atmosphere—an atmosphere of strength.

If we do not have all that we desire, let us make the best use of what we have. The greatest artists are those who have creative genius within themselves and with little material produce the best. It is not the material which makes the artist; it is the artist who shapes the material. If we bear this in mind we shall cease to complain or to find fault either with ourselves or with others.

### III.

#### CONTROL OF BODY AND MIND

To bear what you think you cannot bear is really to bear.—*Ancient Japanese Saying.*

Yield not to unmanliness, it does not befit thee. Casting off thy faint-heartedness, arise.—*Bhagavad-Gita.*

**F**OR all observation we need to have a fitting instrument. Just as to observe the stars and planets one needs a good telescope; similarly, when we are to observe the spiritual aspect of our being, the instrument which we use must be the best possible one. The idea of *Tapas* or mortification, that is, giving discipline to the body and mind, is to prepare them for this end. Instead of allowing the body to rebel when we try to use it, we must make it obey us, just as a well-trained horse obeys the driver. We must bring it to a state of such perfect harmony with our spiritual aspiration that it will never rebel,

but will work in accordance with our highest purpose in life.

At present our body, mind and senses are very like untrained horses. We must learn to control them, therefore, and prove that we have the power to guide them instead of being dragged hither and thither by them. We have been made to believe that if we do not give certain comforts to the body, it will go to pieces. Such thoughts have led us to indulge the body until it has become like a spoiled child. Whatever it demands, we give without discrimination. So also with our mind and senses. It is for us to decide whether we shall yield to every impulse of our physical organism or hold it in check. This is the first step in giving discipline.

Discipline does not mean that we are to mortify or torture our flesh indiscriminately; it means that we must begin to act thoughtfully and teach our body and

mind to be reasonable. We make ourselves slaves so long as we depend on certain fixed conditions. Our first lesson in the spiritual life consists in learning to be physically independent: when we have a comfortable bed to lie on and good food to eat, to enjoy them; but if we are not comfortable or well fed, not to be distressed. So through certain practices we teach our body to obey and to endure. In India these practices are carried almost to an extreme. A person who is sensitive to cold gradually trains his body so that no amount of cold can affect him. In the Himalayas Yogis are to be found sitting in the snow with scarcely any covering on their body. Sensitiveness increases according to our lack of control and also it can be decreased. What we want to do is to bring our body into a balanced state—neither dull, nor over-sensitive, but able to rise above conditions.

The purpose of austerity or self-discipline is not to gain merit or occult powers, but to acquire mastery over all our forces. As we do this, however, powers will come. When a man has learned to control his speech, for instance, whatever he says is bound to come true. This power is gained through silence, by controlling the energy which now is being wasted by unnecessary speech. The truly wise ones do not speak unless by their words they can accomplish something. If a person is indrawn and speaks seldom, every one pays attention to him; but he who is constantly talking, no one heeds his words. What a blessing it is when we have the power to govern our speech; for so much harm is done by unnecessary words. How often things are better left unsaid! Therefore if we can practise silence even a little, we shall have greater power. When a man learns to regulate his speech and thus avoid waste

of energy, his intuition grows keener, his voice becomes stronger, and his language gains a new beauty.

With every one there are certain automatic movements of the hands, feet or other members of the physical organism, which continue even when we think that we are sitting still or resting. These should be checked as they represent a waste of life-force. The Yogis overcome this habit by the systematic practice of *Asanam* or posture: learning to relax every muscle and then training the body to remain motionless in some fixed position. This enables them to conserve their energies and also prepares them for higher spiritual pursuits.

The practice of posture will also aid us in mastering our forces. When we can hold ourselves steadily in one position for any length of time even at the cost of a little discomfort, it will help us to over-

come nervous tension and our body will grow more pliable. Even the long-standing habits of stooping shoulders, hollow chest and crooked spine, can be overcome and all rigidity or abnormal muscular contraction be straightened out through the right use of postures. As we learn these, we gradually rise above the body and realize that our comfort or discomfort is not dependent on place or surroundings. Regulating the body also increases physical health and strength. *Tapas* or mortification means the practice of balance. Excess in any direction is detrimental to our progress; both greediness and slothfulness in mind and body must be checked.

Indulgence means weakness. Why should we indulge the body, if by so doing we do not benefit ourselves? The purpose of denial or discipline is to make the physical instrument a perfect one. Whatever



we do requires some discipline, otherwise our actions cannot be effective. Sitting in silence, controlling all involuntary motions, trying to bring our body and mind into a state of harmony and equilibrium,<sup>9</sup> and holding our mind on one special thought: this is called practice. We must carry on this practice regularly. No matter how much heaviness we may feel, we must devote a fixed time every day to it; and our determination should be to increase rather than decrease the amount of time. In this way very soon we shall gain a hold on our physical and mental nature.

Daily study of the Sacred Books also has great value. We may not fully grasp their meaning at first; but if we make it a habit to study them faithfully and keep it up as a regular duty, in time we shall begin to understand them. As there are certain duties which are necessary for the up-keep of our physical body, similarly

there are certain duties which are necessary for the sustenance of our spiritual nature. Now we may not find spiritual things interesting, because we have become buried in our physical consciousness; but regular study, together with the practice of self-control and concentration, will keep our mind turned in the right direction and revive our spiritual nature. The mind, as long as it is uncontrolled, is like a mad elephant. We may bathe it, but at once it rolls in the dust and makes itself unclean again. Therefore we must use many means to hold the mind, and study is one of these.

Study also brings new associations. If we study the lives of great souls with concentration, it enables us to enjoy their company. It seems to bring us into actual contact with them, as if we lived with them and heard their voices. Such is the value of spiritual study, when we keep it

up persistently. We must not do it fancifully, reading a few verses to-day if we feel like it and perhaps to-morrow giving it up because we do not feel like it. We need firm determination and this is where the value of discipline comes in. We no longer listen to the promptings of our body and mind; we obey the voice of our higher nature—choosing the path which our discrimination points out and following it with whole-hearted devotion.

The mind may not enjoy this, because it has formed the habit of lighter interests. The ordinary mind finds more pleasure in reading a novel than in studying the Bible or the Bhagavad-Gita. Yet one who wishes to sustain his spiritual nature has no other course than to cultivate such a habit, until it becomes second nature and he begins to love it. In India no one will eat until he has gone through his spiritual practices, because there they believe that

these practices are the most vital thing in life. Through them man attains liberation. He learns how he should live; how he may abide by the law and subdue his lower nature; how he may make his body a fitting instrument; and how he may increase the power of the mind to reflect, for the mind has reflecting power and it reflects according to our tendencies and desires.

When we have gathered up our forces and proved ourselves masters, no one can stand in our way. No one can prevent our free action. Let us therefore cast off whatever binds us or leads us to show weakness, and let us strive to cultivate that which will uplift us and awaken our spiritual consciousness, so that in time this body and mind may work in perfect harmony with the Supreme Will. But this cannot be accomplished by calculation or by mere intellectual effort. It is to be

attained through the silent practice of meditation. We must lose the sense that outward things are of primary importance and recognize as truly important only that which we gain by living close to the heart of God. We must learn to be indrawn, to cultivate a deeper mode of thinking. The subjective is so full of vivid interest, it can never create dullness. When we imagine that the meditative life will disturb our outer life, it shows that we have not as yet experienced it; for when we gain access to it, our whole being is filled with new power and spiritual energy.

## IV.

### CONQUEST OF OUR LOWER NATURE

Man is man so long as he is struggling to rise above nature, and this nature is both internal and external.—*Swami Vivekananda.*

Blessed is that man who keeps an even tenor in all affairs of life.—*Samhita.*

ONCE a General approached Lord Buddha and addressed Him thus: “There is one doubt which still lingers in my mind, O Blessed One, and that is concerning duty. I am a soldier. I am appointed by the king to enforce his laws and wage his wars. The Blessed One who teaches kindness and compassion to all living beings, does He permit the punishment of the criminal? Does He declare that it is wrong to go to war for the protection of our homes, our wives, children and property? Does He teach the doctrine of complete self-surrender, so that I should suffer the evil-doer to do what he

pleases and yield submissively to him who would take away violently what is my own? Does the Blessed One maintain that warfare waged for a righteous cause should be abandoned?"

To this Buddha replied: "He who deserves punishment must be punished, and he who is worthy of reward must be rewarded; yet at the same time the teaching is that non-injury, love and kindness to all living beings must be observed. These injunctions are not contradictory. One should be loving and kind; yet one should recognize that the criminal must be punished for the crimes he has committed. His suffering comes not through the ill-will of the judge, but on account of his evil doing. His own acts have brought misfortune upon him. Therefore let him not harbor thoughts of hatred in his heart; let him consider that this is the fruit of his own action; as soon as he will under-

stand that, the punishment will purify his soul and he will no longer lament his fate, but will rejoice in it.”

The Blessed One then continued: “Warfare in which man tries to slay his brother is lamentable, but those who go to war in a righteous cause, after exhausting all means to preserve the peace, are not blameworthy. He should be blamed who is the cause of the war. Struggle there must be in this life, for all life is a struggle of some kind. He who struggles in the interest of self—that he may be great or powerful or rich or famous—will have no reward; but he who struggles for righteousness and for Truth will have great reward, for even his defeat will be a victory.”

Then Lord Buddha, addressing the General, said: “O General, he who goes to battle, even though it be in a righteous cause, must be prepared to be slain by his



enemies, for that is the destiny of warriors; and should this fate overtake him, he has no reason for complaint. But he who is victorious should remember that all earthly things are fleeting and transitory. Whatever his success, however great it may be, the wheel of life may turn again and bring him down to the dust. If, however, he is moderate; if, extinguishing all hatred from his heart, he lifts his down-trodden enemy up and says: 'Come now, let us have peace and be brothers;' he will gain not mere transitory success, but a true victory, the fruit of which will remain forever. Great is a successful general, but he who has conquered self is a greater victor. The doctrine of the conquest of self is not taught to destroy the souls of men, but to preserve them. He who has conquered self is more fit to live and to gain victories than he who is the slave of self. He whose mind is free from

all delusion regarding the self, he will stand and not fall in the battle of life."

Christ said: "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" The conquest which any human being seeks in the external world is insignificant in comparison with that which lies within his own self; and until he has conquered his inner kingdom, all outer conquests must be fleeting and uncertain, for his own unwise actions may at any moment cause his ruin. Even though the world may regard him as a conqueror, even though he may consider himself invincible, he is not a conqueror in the spiritual sense so long as he is willing to give his soul life in exchange for any material advantage. He may gain the whole world, but it will profit him nothing. In all the lofty spiritual messages of the great Teachers one ideal stands out above all

others,—that each one must rouse himself and bring out what is best in him. He must learn to stand up and hold himself above nature; for a man who constantly obeys nature like a bond-slave gradually loses the power of independent action, and life sooner or later must prove joyless and burdensome to him.

The tendency of the average mind is outgoing. All its ambitions and interests are directed towards external things; but however much it may gain materially, there is always something lacking to make its happiness complete. Take, for example, the life of Alexander the Great. The world has rarely seen such a conqueror, yet within him there remained something unconquered and this often tormented him when there was no outward cause for unhappiness. Such is the universal experience. Should we not try therefore to acquire something more satis-

ying? Should we be content to lead a life of slavery, obeying the impulses of our physical nature? This question must eventually arise within every heart; no one can evade it. Each one must face and answer it. It is the starting-point of all religion.

As we are now, we have very little control over ourselves; even this body which we call ours refuses to obey us and we are constantly driven hither and thither by the undisciplined forces of our nature. But one who has perfect control over the body is not made restless by his physical energies; instead of distracting him, they serve to bring him serenity and freedom, for they become constructive, not destructive elements in his evolution. Sri Krishna declares in the Gita: "He indeed is a truly happy man who can withstand the impulse of greed, lust or anger even before he is separated from this

body.” And this represents a greater manifestation of power than when we make another person obey us. The man who desires to rule must begin by ruling himself. He must prove that he is the master in his own dwelling-house. Instead of allowing his physical organism to dictate his course of action, he must make every part of his body subordinate to his will.

We all have power within us; but when this power is dissipated or ungoverned, it brings an unhealthy condition of mind and body. Disease more often comes from misdirection of the life-force than from lack of it. We allow ourselves to fall into a negative state and gradually hypnotize ourselves into the belief that we are without power or will. But the Great Ones constantly remind us that if man is to attain his freedom, he must awaken and raise himself by his higher Self.

Even a Divine Incarnation cannot save one who is without the will to be saved and devoid of the energy necessary to follow His example and precepts. A certain degree of self-reliance or faith in our higher Self is essential for our spiritual regeneration. Each soul is inherently divine.

No one can ever attain the supreme goal until he has become conscious of his higher Self. The surface being, who constantly identifies himself with physical conditions and makes himself believe that he has no power to conquer, no power to overcome obstacles—that man must be put aside. Nor does this mean self-torture or self-annihilation, it means rising above limitations. It is not that the physical man must be destroyed; not so; but the causes of those lower impulses in us, which lead us to hate or strike in anger or do any unworthy act, must be rooted out. This is not achieved by destroying our eyes,

ears, or any organ by which we may perform evil deeds. We must go behind the sense organs to find the real cause of evil in us. The senses are merely instruments, and when properly controlled, they become powerful aids towards our spiritual advancement. "Through the practice of austerity man may deaden the feelings of the senses, but longing still lingers in the heart; all longings drop off, when one has attained the Highest."

The little man, the man who sorrows, who grieves, who feels constantly that he is a helpless mortal, that man must expand and gain another vision by which he can realize his freedom. The Upanishads give a very beautiful illustration showing the relation between the lower self and the higher Self. They are like two birds sitting on the same tree of life. One hops from branch to branch trying to gratify his desires by tasting the different fruits

of the tree; the other sits calm, majestic and free from desire. As the first bird moves about tasting the sweet and bitter fruits and experiencing pleasure or disappointment, joy or sorrow, he suddenly beholds that other bird of like plumage, sitting serene and ever-conscious of his divine nature. As he gazes at it, his delusions fall away from him and he realizes his oneness with that higher Self. Until a man becomes master of his lower nature, he can never gain that lofty vision which sets him free; therefore he must rise step by step until he attains it. He must deal first with what is nearest and most definite, his physical organism. He must see how far he can make his body obey him,—his hands, feet, and all his senses. Let him next try to make his mind obedient to him. Let him subdue both body and mind and make them instruments in his hands to work out his freedom.



This is how we must begin the conquest of self. We must watch over our bodily activities and strive to avoid all unnecessary expenditure of energy. Needless talking is one of the most usual forms of this waste and often results in nervous exhaustion. Uneven and impulsive use of our forces, leading to extremes of activity and inactivity, is another. This must be overcome by steadfast practice of moderation or balance in all our bodily habits, even the most insignificant ones. We must exercise conscious control in our eating, drinking, talking, walking, sleeping, in our work and recreation. This will enable us eventually to gather up our bodily forces, which are now being dissipated through lack of proper control and direction, and unite them into one strong whole.

Next our mental forces, which at present run hither and thither unrestrained,

must be brought into subjection. As the first step in this task we must try to cultivate the faculty of discrimination. We must not follow blindly every impulse that rises in our mind, but we must learn to reflect and to distinguish between what is fleeting and what is lasting, what is essential and what is non-essential, between what is pleasing to our bodily appetites and what is wholesome for our soul. The next step is to keep our mind fixed on the path chosen by our discriminative faculty. Thus firmly holding our thought develops in us the power of concentration, without which we can never hope to gain victory over the lower nature. This may seem a difficult task, but it is possible to every human being who strives with determined will and perseverance.

From the very outset of our spiritual life we must root out the negative thought that we cannot do anything. Once for all

we must shake off this notion and learn to believe that we can do even what seems impossible—not in any spirit of arrogance, however, thinking that we possess individual power; but because we are part of God, because God dwells within us and all things are possible unto Him. This should be our prevailing thought, until we gain control over our little self and put down our lower propensities, which veil the true vision of our higher nature.

Christ, Buddha and other illumined Souls are often called masters. Why? Because they conquered in themselves those impulses which must be overcome, and which are the source of all fear, jealousy, hatred and ignorance. It is because they thus conquered that they are masters. And being masters of themselves they alone can be masters of men. If we wish to attain this state of mastery, we must make our own self obedient to our will.

It is not the aggressive man or the man with strong muscles who can expect to gain freedom; but the man who reflects, the man who governs his appetites, the man who lives in moderation, the man who has power to forgive, to love even his enemies; for he is the stronger man.

The power of resistance is good, but the power of non-resistance is greater. As long as we have the feeling that some one is attacking us, we must protect our interest. But there may come a time when, through the expansion of our nature, such feelings will disappear and we shall know that nothing can touch us. One may strike us, or speak angry words, but our understanding will place us so far above the blow or the insult that no impulse to retaliate will rise in us. And this is called non-resistance. When our lower nature no longer asserts itself in us, whatever may be the provocation, then self-conquest is complete.

This indeed is the loftiest thing man can accomplish; for then his kingdom is not confined to a fixed country or people, but he carries his kingdom wherever he goes. Always is he the master. No external condition can disturb him, therefore he lives in eternal peace and happiness. So long as our thoughts, ambitions and unsatisfied desires haunt us and make us restless, we know that we cannot find either freedom or peace even by going into the jungle. Self-conquest alone will give us that for which all men are seeking. Let us then lay hold on the sword of wisdom and the shield of perseverance, that we may fight with undaunted courage and gain victory over our only enemy, the self.

## V.

### HOW TO CONSERVE OUR ENERGIES

A superior man is calm and large of spirit, the vulgar are always fretting.—*Confucius*.

The wise man of joyous soul, without straining or striving, is always a perfect master of himself.—*Samhita*.

**A**CCORDING to ancient Indian philosophy this universe is composed of two principal elements. One is called *Akasa*, an all-pervading primordial substance, imperceptible to the senses, but manifested in the basic elements,—earth, water, air, fire and ether, out of which all bodies come into existence. The other, which holds together these material forms, is known as *Prana* or vital force, the force by which man lives and without which he can do nothing. The senses which appear to be such important factors in our life would be of little use without this vital force, so also the mind and every part of the physical organism. We should there-

fore try to understand what the nature of this life-force is and how it may be controlled; for the great Indian teachers have taught us that by proper control of this force a man can be not only physically healthy, but intellectually brilliant; he can also rise spiritually and become illumined.

At present there are very few who know the use or even the existence of this *Prana*, for we cannot see it. Most of us live here unconsciously, doing everything automatically through habit. We utilize our energies without thinking what they are or what they should bring us; still less does it occur to us that it is our duty to conserve and direct them to definite ends. Yet we shall not know what true health or happiness or illumination is until we have learned how to gather up these vital forces of our organism and command them at our will. Just as light when dissipated scarcely suffices to read by, but when we

put a shade over it and concentrate its rays we are able to see the finest print; similarly when all the forces manifested through our body, mind and senses are stored up, regulated and focused, we discover possibilities of wisdom and happiness within us of which we are wholly unconscious at present.

But how is this to be accomplished? Some may think hastily that by not doing anything we may store up our energies. It has been found, however, that the energy of a man who does nothing, instead of increasing, fades away. On the other hand, if we imagine that by constant use of our faculties we can gain greater power, that is also a mistake; for we know that through overwork a man often breaks down. Neither of these methods therefore can help us to conserve and increase our energy. But there is a way by which it can be done,—not by overworking, nor



by stopping work, but by finding balance in all our activity. When this balance is manifested in the physical body, the result is good health; when it is manifested on the mental plane, we have intellectual power; when it is manifested on the spiritual plane, the result is super-consciousness or illumination. But the energy is one. It is always the same life-force which the Indian Sages called *Prana*—the 'vital cause of our existence, of all our thinking and doing. It manifests itself on every plane; but as we are able to draw it up from our lower organism, we gain ever-increasing power for higher things. ,

As thought guides all our bodily activities, so the Sages found that thought was the best medium for directing this life-force. How little attention we pay to this great instrument which is placed in our hands by God Almighty! How often we abuse or misuse it! Yet our actions can

never produce the best results until our thoughts are properly regulated. Only as we cease to dissipate our mental energies and are able to establish a balance between our outer and our inner activities, between our body and our mind, can we hope to have either peace or strength.

Every living being, even the most insignificant, has the same possibility of awakening this great life-force within himself. As a rule, however, we run after pleasure and power to try to gain these from the external universe. The result is that we are always rushing outward and we do not stop to think what we have within ourselves. Whenever a problem arises in our mind, our tendency is to go outside; we hasten to consult a book or some person; but the wise men tell us that we have within ourselves the key to all knowledge. In fact, no one can give us knowledge beyond the point where our

inner nature is unfolded. We must therefore discover this inner storehouse of energy, and in our search it is best to deal first with that which is most immediate.

This body is the most immediate reality to the majority of people. We may talk of subtle spiritual forces, of an imperceptible soul abiding within, but very few can understand or believe in the reality of finer things. For that reason we must begin with the grossest of all instruments, the physical body. And the first question which arises is, have we this body under perfect control. Do our hands and feet, our senses and other organs obey us? Can we govern and direct them as our higher instincts prompt us? When we analyze, we find that very few of us have any power of control over what we call the body. The energies which manifest through it have become dissipated and because of this dissipation our eyes cannot bring us perfect

vision, our ears and all our senses can give us only partial knowledge; that is why our perceptions are never free from error. But when we go to the foundation of our being and gather up all our forces, then we gain command over them and can utilize them to our best advantage.

Matter cannot exist without the support and co-operation of *Prana*; therefore if man wants anything, he must try to understand this vital principle; and to do this he must first of all find balance. As long as there is undue activity or lethargy in our body, we cannot have true insight. What we need is to gain equilibrium in our whole organism, for equilibrium means strength. This little body of ours, this instrument which God has given us, we should train and control it in such a way that it will be a true aid in our spiritual journey, instead of being the drawback it too often is.

Very few indeed are regulating and directing their forces properly. How much energy do we waste talking unnecessarily or in permitting useless automatic physical action which only exhausts us? How much nervousness and misery might human beings avoid by a wise expenditure of their God-given energies! To remedy this is the stepping-stone to religion. Religion is not confined to one department of life. It has to do not only with man's soul nature, with his spiritual interest, it covers the whole ground of his being. For how can man arouse his spiritual interest until he has freed himself from physical bondage? All things work together. There is only one law and the law is uniform on all planes. What is good for one plane is good for all.

If man tries to upbuild his body, not for selfish ends, but in order that he may acquire greater wisdom, there is no wrong in

his devoting himself to the care of his physical being; but he cannot gain either health or strength until he has proper control over that part of his nature through which all his power comes. Man cannot truly enter into possession of his own latent possibilities until he has discovered and connected himself with his inner resources—until he has awakened his spiritual nature. If he is outdrawn, dragged hither and thither by his uncontrolled energies, he must try to be indrawn. He must cultivate his faculty of intra-vision. He has been looking outward so long without realizing his dream or finding true happiness; let him now look within and see if he cannot find there what he has been vainly searching for on the outside.

As long as man strives madly for pleasure, without using his faculty of discrimination, he merely exhausts himself and makes himself miserable. Nor should he

go to the other extreme and practise self-torture. That man alone enjoys real blessing who observes moderation in all his activities. We must neither destroy any of our propensities nor become slaves to them; but we must take a masterly attitude towards them. And this is a great lesson that everyone needs to learn. How often we raise our voices and want others to obey us; but have we succeeded in making ourselves obey? Yet we have the power. All power is within us. The very power which enables us to see ordinary things can be stored up in such a way that it will give us divine sight; the power which helps us to hear these outer sounds and gain knowledge of this material world, can also lead us upward and enable us to hear the Eternal and gain knowledge of that which satisfies the soul of man.

We must therefore gather up our forces

and gathering up means concentration, and concentration means strength. A single thread is easily broken, but when a number of threads are put together and twisted into twine, what power of resistance they have! Similarly all our small dissipated forces can be gathered together and through the power of concentration twisted into one strong whole; then we shall be able to resist anything. It is through such positive thoughts that the Sages have taught us—not that we are sinners, but that each one can save himself; that the only saving grace for each one of us is in his own higher spiritual nature; and until we have awakened that, no one can save us. Do you suppose that by merely making laws for the prevention of crime we can prevent it? What we want is education, and the greatest education is to give man confidence in his higher Self. If he will awaken to that Spirit



within and follow it, then will he find that it is his true Saviour.

Until we have gained control over our lower nature, however, we never even suspect that we have imbedded in our heart the potentiality for the highest illumination and the highest happiness. We should therefore form the habit of having certain hours when we relax and withdraw from all bodily activities. We find in all religions times set apart for prayer and meditation. Why? Because so long as we constantly move outward and do not look within, forgetting the vital factor in our life, there is nothing to sustain or nourish us. We must always try to keep ourselves connected with the Storehouse of our life-force; and the more we can do this, the more irresistible shall we become. The man who has command over his vital energy or *Prana* will always accomplish greater things in less time and with less

exertion. Also the more quickly we can achieve victory over our lower self, the sooner shall we gain spiritual illumination.

These ideas of self-conquest, of the power of concentration and meditation, are not peculiarly Indian. In every religion, wherever there has been any true growth of spiritual thought, you will find that it has come from an indrawn, meditative life. Even material scientists, how much they have to concentrate on a problem before they can solve it; for concentration always throws light and gives greater power. Physical concentration is necessary to gain health of body; mental concentration is necessary to sharpen our intellect; and when we have practised these two well and with discrimination, there will come a time when we can direct all our forces towards spiritual regeneration. Then the things which seem to us

impossible to-day will become absolute realities. Our doubts will vanish of their own accord, for where there is sunlight there cannot be any darkness.

All the imperfection and limitation which we feel in our body and mind we can remove by not constantly thinking of this immediate, apparent, physical existence, but by joining our thoughts with the Higher Source, the Fountainhead of life and energy. When we can remain focused there, we shall be able to go on doing our duties without feeling any reaction. That is one of the great secrets of the Indian Teachers. Through the ages they have taught that man can make his work a recreation; and that if he will connect himself with the Highest and keep his motive lofty, his work instead of exhausting him will bring him even greater strength. It is not necessary for us to retire to a corner or become inactive to

### *How to Conserve our Energies* 71

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restore our vitality. If we will but learn to practise balance and moderation in all our activity, we shall enjoy true health of body and mind and shall attain spiritual illumination and freedom.

## VI.

### SELF-HELP AND SELF-SURRENDER

When the fruit grows, the petals drop off of themselves. So when Divinity in thee increases, the weakness of humanity in thee will vanish.—*Sri Ramakrishna*.

The wise man is governed by God and on this account is blessed.—*Sextus the Pythagorean*.

His heart will stoop to thine, will take it up and make it His. One heart shall serve for both.—*Siva Vakyar*.

**S**ELF-HELP and self-surrender are the cardinal teachings of all religions and philosophies. Man is persistently told on the one hand that he must “raise himself by his Self, and must never lower himself, for he alone is his own friend and he alone is his own enemy”; while on the other hand he is taught with equal insistence that he should never rely on his individual strength, but should trust wholly to God. How are we to reconcile these two apparently contradictory ideas? How can we be self-helping and at the same time surrender ourselves

wholly to the Supreme? Yet we find these two ideas preached in all Scriptures by all Teachers; so although they may seem diametrically opposite, there must be some relation, some basis of harmony between them.

There are different grades in the conception of the individual ego. Our first conception of I-ness comes through birth and environment, we are born in a certain family, with a certain name and position, and we measure our whole importance by these; but as we grow in understanding, we learn to identify ourselves less and less with outer conditions and nature. Then we discover that there are finer forces than the merely physical upon which we depend. When in ordinary human existence a man says "I am the doer," that sense of I-ness arises from his identification of himself with the body. He is conscious that he has strong muscles, that he

has a certain amount of power; but this strength, being entirely confined to the physical plane, is necessarily limited. He may not realize this as long as he has a healthy body and can accomplish whatever he wishes through his bodily energies, but sooner or later he must come to recognize that the power manifested through the physical is too insufficient to carry him very far. This naturally leads him to seek something higher and greater upon which he can safely lean.

Thus in all the various stages of progression, we shall carry the same idea of ego, only with different understanding. The ego which binds us to the body and bodily conditions is called the unripe ego, and this brings misery and misfortune; but the ripe ego, which springs from our higher nature, liberates us. It is this ego which leads us to surrender ourselves wholly to God. Of course self-surrender

does not mean that we have to abandon all duties and activities. On the contrary, it is through consecrated action, through constant practice of the ideal, that we become purified and are able to see the hand of the Divine in everything. But as long as we believe that we are the doers, we must help ourselves. So long as we feel that the whole responsibility lies in our hands, we must make every possible effort.

It is useless to suppose that we can give up all idea of ego at once and be conscious that God is working through us. We do not see God working. We are talking, we are performing our tasks, we have hands and feet, we possess strength. As long as we hold to these notions, we must act for ourselves. We cannot do otherwise. But if in all our actions we practise discrimination, that will in time unfold our true nature and enable us to perceive the real source of our power. When we be-



come conscious of that mighty Cause of all things, then we cannot but yield ourselves up to His guidance. Thus self-help will lead to self-surrender.

The more clearly we see God working everywhere, the more easily we shall be able to resign ourselves to Him. It is very difficult for ignorant people to practise self-surrender, because they have not consciously experienced the existence of a Cosmic Power. They do not know that there is such a thing. They must first test their own powers. They must, prove through the use of all their energies, physical and mental, whether they themselves are the real doers or whether they are governed by some superior power. They must learn through the practice of discrimination what part of their being is matter and what part is God; then when they have come to perceive the difference between soul and body, spirit and matter,

the undying and the dying, they will surely cling to that which is deathless; for who does not cling to life, who will not naturally look for help and protection to that which is most mighty?

It is not an easy thing to surrender ourselves absolutely to God. We must first understand something of His Divine nature and power; otherwise, if we pretend to practise self-surrender, without really believing that God is the only Doer and that all happens through His will, our words and actions will always be inconsistent. There is a parable of a Brahman, who once killed a cow. Killing for a Brahman, whose life is supposed to be dedicated to God and to the practice of non-injury and love for all creatures, is a terrible crime. When the Brahman was accused of killing the cow, he declared: "I did not do it. Indra (the Lord of the senses) is responsible, not I." To show

him his error, God, assuming human form entered his garden and began to praise its beauty and the skill of his gardener. The Brahman replied with pride: "Oh, no, I myself have done everything; come and I will show you the different parts of my garden." As he led his visitor about he kept exclaiming: "See, I planted these trees and shrubs, I laid out these paths, I made these flower beds." Every other word was "I". The Lord listened patiently for some time; then he exclaimed: "You have done all these things; only for killing the cow the poor Lord is responsible."

That is too often our position. We may say "Thy will, not mine," but we feel in our heart of hearts that we are the real doers. If a harsh word is spoken, we feel hurt and grow angry; or if we are praised, we become elated. But this is not the case with one who knows that everything happens through God's will. He is always the

same, in happiness, in misery, in praise or blame. He accepts all things with even-mindedness. He does not lose his balance, he does not curse life when things go wrong; because he recognizes that God is the Doer and that whatever comes from Him must be a blessing. Surrendering to God makes a man so mighty, so fearless, that nothing in life or death can disturb his serenity.

Such faith in the Supreme is the basis of true self-reliance. With such faith one can accomplish the most impossible things. As Christ said :“If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you.” Such is the power of faith. When we have realized the Divine within us, what can shake us? As long, however, as we identify ourselves with name, form and physical limit-

ations, our power must be limited and therefore our vision of truth also must be veiled; because darkness and light cannot co-exist, and the sense of "I" is the greatest darkness which can cover the soul. The Sages indeed have declared that there is no enemy greater or more potent than the ego.

As long as we identify ourselves with this ego or our lower nature, we can never transcend delusion or ignorance. Therefore we must subdue our lower self by surrendering it to the higher Self. Let that higher Self, or the God within, take the lead in everything. The true devotee says: "Not I, not I, but Thou. I am nothing. What can I accomplish? The sooner I can resign myself to Thy will, the better." The *Gnani* or philosopher declares: "I am not this body. I am not the senses. I am none of these things. I am He. I am that which is formless,

deathless, eternal, unchangeable." One is the dualistic point of view, the other the monistic; but both lead to the same end.

Christ expressed the two phases in different stages of His spiritual consciousness, When He said: "Not my will but Thine be done"; "Thou art my Father, my Lord, I am Thy son, Thy servant"; His attitude was that of a devotee. When, on the other hand, He declared: "I and my Father are one," He expressed the monistic attitude of a follower of the path of wisdom. In one phase we look upon God as a separate Being. He is the Creator and Preserver, the real Father, and we surrender to Him, recognizing the limitation of our lower self. In the other phase we rise above the plane of the lower self and realize our identity with the Supreme. In either case, whether we see that Truth

within ourselves or outside ourselves, we transcend human imperfection.

When we are convinced that God is the only Doer, the only Guide, that all the power which we possess comes from Him and that we are merely instruments in His hand, we attain freedom even in this life and nothing can overthrow us. But the ego is very deluding. It is said that even the gods are deceived and fall under its sway. In one of the Upanishads the story is told that once the Devas (Bright Ones) achieved a great victory, and being filled with pride they proclaimed: "This victory is ours., We ourselves have achieved it;" and each one boasted of his power. Suddenly they perceived a mysterious form. Brahman, the Doer of all things, appeared before them; but they did not know what it was that they saw, so one by one they were sent to find out. First, the Fire-god approached

the mysterious form, who asked him what power he possessed. "I have the power to burn the whole universe." "Then try to burn this straw," the Lord said, but he could not. Then came the Wind-god and Brahman asked him what power he possessed. "I can blow this entire universe away." "Then blow this straw which I place before you." He tried, but could not. At last Indra, the head of the gods, went; and as he approached nearer, he realized that the mysterious form was none other than Brahman, the Supreme Lord Himself, to whom all glory and praise belong; that to Him alone was due their victory and not to themselves.

Surrender to God is the greatest sign of wisdom. The ignorant man, who clings to this ego, must suffer constantly. The man who surrenders himself to God as the Doer of all things, he alone finds peace. Through his life and actions he becomes



blessed and brings blessing to others; for he no longer acts through selfishness or ignorance, but he becomes a direct instrument in the hands of God and all his doings are filled with Divine Love and Wisdom.